



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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Wakefield, on "Some Aspects of the Religious Training of Children." The Bishop dwelt on the best way of teaching the Bible to the young, especially the Old Testament, and the support that might be given to their faith by helping them to understand from the beginning the less advanced views of right and wrong in early unenlightened days, and the errors that might have crept in, in translation or transcription. But how ever impossible it might be to enter fully into difficulties, above all was it important that our teaching should be of a kind to leave the children nothing to *un*learn in days to come.

WOODFORD.—On Thursday, Jan. 17th, at 8.30, a meeting of this branch was held in the beautiful hall of Monkham (at the kind invitation of Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Hills). The Rev. the Hon. Canon Lyttleton, of Haileybury, lectured, and the chair was occupied by Mr. Arnold Hills, who in a brief introductory speech expressed his pleasure at being privileged to listen to one so well qualified to speak to parents as the distinguished lecturer of the evening; especially upon a subject of such vital importance as the "Teaching of Religion to Children." Canon Lyttleton then prefaced his address with a brief survey of the intellectual and moral condition of the country at the present time, and said that, without being unduly pessimistic, it must be recognised as a fact that in all professions there is to-day a dearth of first-class men, *i.e.*, men of first-rate ability and high moral character. This pointed to depletion, and among thoughtful people this indication is causing a feeling of grave apprehensiveness—at least. The lecturer, in proceeding with his subject, said that in his opinion the most difficult period in the life of any human being was, perhaps, the years between twelve and twenty-one or twenty-two; a time of struggle, of yearning, and of temptation. He considered the prevalent method of dealing with those who had fallen under temptation was hardly that employed throughout the New Testament, but rather a reversal of that method, character being regarded as the outcome of conduct instead of the reverse, and the tempted being advised to place reliance upon their own will which had already proved itself untrustworthy. He suggested that, following the example set forth in the Gospels, a child should be taught rather trust, confidence and faith in the new Spirit within him; which, though part of himself, was yet divine and in divine communication with the source of all righteousness. A fall under temptation was the result of ignoring or forgetting this divine life within; and, just as a limb becomes weakened and ultimately atrophied by disuse, so would this Divine Power become weakened and enfeebled by constantly being left unused, neglected, or forgotten. This mode of inculcating religious truths, Canon Lyttleton, by experience, had found the most efficacious in establishing character; that most calculated to re-establish self-respect after a lapse; and that least likely to produce the morbid despair so common in young people after repeated failures of their own will-power. The lecture was listened to throughout with rapt attention by an earnest, cultured audience, and in conclusion a vote of thanks to the lecturer was proposed by Dr. Albert Wilson and seconded by the Rev. — Swallow. The usual votes of thanks to the host and hostess, &c., were then proposed and responded to cordially.

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A BOY'S RELIGION.*

BY THE REV. J. HARRY MILLER.

It is when you try to define "A Boy's Religion" that you recognize the difficulty of the subject. At first sight it seems simple. It is on second thoughts complex. The subject is comprehensive almost to vagueness. The range of it is so wide that it would be quite easy to speak at great length upon the general question, without in any way helping those to whom the question is a pressing one—how am I to teach my boy religion? and then leave the subject in the holy fog in which it is already enveloped in many minds. But I take it that the object of your society forbids such vagueness, and that we are met in friendly conference upon a definite matter.

I have scant title to the honour you do me in asking me to speak upon this subject. But my heart is with our boys, and some years of special interest in the subject, and some special opportunities of meeting boys at religious gatherings, have impressed upon my mind some plain facts about a boy's religion. The result of my own experience and of my work is gladly put at your disposal.

By "a boy," in what I say to-day, I mean a boy after nursery days and even early school days are past. Roughly speaking, I refer to that happy, whistling, untiring bundle of activity of ten years old and upwards—whose delight in the mere joy of living, and corresponding disregard of personal appearance, combine to fascinate his lovers. But it is not

* A paper read before the Edinburgh Branch of the P.N.E.U.
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possible to disregard earlier days, for *there* lie the secret and source of his later religiousness or irreligiousness. Socrates says, "Then are you aware that in every work the beginning is the more important part, especially in dealing with anything young and tender? for that is the time when any impression which one may desire to communicate is most readily stamped and taken." The opening mind of a child is ready to receive impressions. Its early atmosphere is of immeasurable importance. Every child has many forces working to the making of its character.

- (a) It inherits powers and tendencies; it is a bundle of possibilities. When we say that a boy is like his father or his mother, we often express a deeper truth than we think. Heredity is a fact with which we must reckon.
- (b) It comes into a home and atmosphere; and the purity, gladness and deep peace of its home have strong power in moulding its character.

People speak sometimes of knowing their children; but children know their parents as accurately as parents know their children. A child's sight is very keen. It sees character where older people see only action. The child soon begins to want its own way and authority. The first pitched-battle of obedience is a very important matter. Its occasion may be some apparently trifling matter; but it is not to be trifled with. The child wants to know if you mean what you say; and it is often here that the greatest matters are settled. Give an order in quiet determination: your baby-boy sees otherwise, and objects; the order may be very small, and it may not seem worth while to enforce it for its own sake, but it is for the boy's sake, for it is not your authority that is at stake, but your *sincerity*.

There! I have come already to what is, in my opinion, one of the central things in a boy's religion. Give up the enforcement of your order—and for the first time, the idea that you said what you did not mean has entered in. I fear this practice of threatening, or promising what it is never intended to perform, is too common in all ranks of life. It is untruthfulness. If you don't mean it, don't say it. I speak feelingly. I have missed more than one chance of getting near to a boy, by being held over his devoted head as a kind of final moral plenipotentiary; the boy did not fear me, for

he knew it was only a threat, and he despised it and me together. In, say, the first ten years of a child's life, it seems to me that a boy is most influenced by his mother; after that, when the wider world of school opens and he has to "take sides," he begins to be his father's boy. I am not able to say confidently if a kind of reverse process is not found in a girl's life; but I think it! A girl twines herself round her father's heart in early days; when womanhood dawns, the love and admiration for her mother draw her closer to her. Of course it is easily seen why a boy is his mother's boy at first; he is more with her than with his father. His father is often away all day; yet to some of us, father has been father and mother in one. During these early years example is all-important. Self-control, quietness, tenderness, are conditions of power for good. "Self-government with tenderness,—here you have the condition of all authority over children. The child must discover in us no passion, no weakness of which he can make use. The child who can rouse in us anger or impatience or excitement, feels himself stronger than we, and a child only respects strength. The mother should consider herself as her child's sun, a changeless and ever-radiant world, whither the small restless creature, quick at tears and laughter, light, fickle, passionate, full of storms, may come for fresh stores of light, warmth and electricity, of calm and courage. The mother represents goodness, providence, law; that is to say, the divinity under that form of it which is accessible to childhood. If she is herself passionate, she will impose on her child a capricious and despotic god, or even several discordant gods. The religion of a child depends on what its father and mother are, and not on what they say. The inner and unconscious ideal which guides their life, is precisely what touches the child; their words, their remonstrances, their punishments, their bursts of feeling even are for him merely stage-thunder and comedy; what they worship, this it is which his instinct divines and reflects. The child sees what we are behind what we appear to be; hence his reputation as a physiognomist. He extends his power as far as he can with each of us; he is the most subtle of diplomatists. Unconsciously he passes under the influence of each person about him, and reflects it while transforming it after his own nature. He is a magnifying mirror. That is why the first principle of education is—train

yourself; and the first rule to follow if you wish to possess yourself of a child's will is—master your own.”*

Grant that a boy has grown up to school years, and gone to school. New forces enter now; not only teacher and lessons, but other boys. He enters a little high-spirited community. The sense of his being a social animal inspires his little heart to many quaint little airs. He no longer walks alone, but in a knot of more or less deliciously careless and happy little friends, who, if their young hearts are sprinkled from an evil conscience are not careful that their hands are often washed with pure water! The sight of his nurse is enough to bring a blush to his face, and as the years pass he speaks of his sisters seldom and with a great reserve. But along other ways he is developing. His mind opens to new influences. Hero-worship begins; temptations are more frequent. Much that no one knows is going on in his mind and heart; he speaks little of it. The old daring delight in speaking of holy things is not known so much; he is thinking more, and the ever-present world claims much of his eager attention. Has he any room for religion? Is it not enough that he be a bright-faced, happy-hearted little animal, not to be depressed by the solemn sadness of religious talk? These are the kinds of questions that are often asked—revealing the deep-seated fallacy of many minds that to be religious means to be less of a man, a narrowing and curbing of life somewhere.

Here we face our special subject, and ask, “What do we mean by religion”? I mean Christianity. I take it we are all at one in this, though there is room for difference of opinion upon what is implied in the word. We are Christian men and women, seeing in Jesus Christ the highest, holiest manhood; wishful to understand how we may best bring to bear upon our boys the truths of our Christian faith. Yet I preferred the word religion because we so often confuse Christianity with creeds, and a boy's mind naturally is not laid hold of by any cold however perfect creed. The systematic statement of our faith appeals to matured minds; they identify, then, the statement with the faith, and imagine that boys are not interested at first in philosophic or theologic formulæ, and therefore that they are not interested in Christianity. There is no greater mistake. A boy is uninterested in that way of stating the faith; he is interested

* *Amiel's Journal.*

in Jesus Christ Himself. Those who are accustomed to state their faith in terms of theology, or creed, or catechism, rather than of life, being older in years than boys, and thinking that their faith has no interest for boys, tell us that religion is for grown-up people, that a boy should be careless, happy and thoughtless, and leave religion till he is older, that “you cannot put old heads on young shoulders,” that “boys will be boys.” Yes, and boys will be men, and the converse is also true, it is far from easy to put “young heads upon old shoulders.” I wish I could do it. It would stop a great many of the foolish and mischievous ideas that are rife about boys' religion. For most emphatically I say, not only that a boy ought to be religious, but that every boy born into and trained in a Christian home, *is* religious, and is open to the influence of all true and happy and holy religious life.

It is not desirable to draw a picture of an ideal boy, we have to do with the real, to do with him at the age when he is most difficult to truly understand and most easy to influence, when his observation is keen, and his soul susceptible in the highest degree to the pure examples of noble men and women, when he will scorn insincerity or give way to duplicity. How are we to deal with him? I shall try to look at it, for a little, as a boy; it is not easy, for the added experience of years creeps in to modify and change the aspect of life and religion. It is not wholly possible to be a boy again. This year, at Mertoun Camp, I daresay outsiders did not see much to choose between some of the boys and the chaplain in point of apparel and behaviour, but there was a great gulf fixed; “a sea flowed between us, our different past.” As a boy, I did not want only stories when religion was in the question. The practice of telling about good little boys—problematical and phantasmal—who always did right, but who were not real, has done grave injury to children's religion. A healthy boy is not easily deceived, and he hates a milksop. I liked my moral in my story—if at all! I did not want wearisome descriptions of how the temple was built, when a Bible lesson was given, nor texts quoted to me about the forgiveness of sin, and I shuddered when I thought of God as going about with His “unlidded eye, aware, awake”; but it did not make me religious. Now, history, in the Bible or out of it, never failed to hold me enthralled. The battle of Hastings is as clear to me, from my first reading of it, as the relief of Ladysmith. The crusades made my

blood run fast. *Ivanhoe* was a dear treasure. Why? because they contain truth. And thus I return to what I regard as of primary importance in a boy's religion—*reality*; and, beginning with it, I would pass on to two other factors in healthy boyish religious life—*naturalness* and *sense of honour*.

(1) *Reality*: (2) *Naturalness*: (3) *Honour*.

(1) *Reality*. It is hardly necessary to do more than state this. In teaching religion you must be true. A boy's heart knows the true ring, and he knows the false. He does not mince matters. He calls a true man "a brick": a false one "a humbug." He is always effective if not academic in his characterisations. He looks for religion in real life, and he takes every word upon it to this test—"do they live that?" "Of such is the Kingdom of God." "Everyone that is of the truth heareth My voice." Let a boy find you out as deliberately insincere, and either of two things will happen: he will leave you and find true religion somewhere, or he will leave religion as a sham, and become your companion who does not trust you. Reality, sincerity, are essential to religious influence over a boy. If a parent lives a selfish life and makes a show of religion, his children believe his life, not his appearance, and they frame their lives accordingly. A boy naturally demands reality: he takes much on trust. Fail him; play him false; and he not only distrusts you, but the whole system which you represent to him. A boy's most usual question is, "Do you mean it?" He hates hypocrisy: and he has a very quick instinct that can tell when a speaker on religion is speaking because he has to say something, or because he has something to say.

In what are we to train him?

The Reality of the Old Testament and New Testament is his delight. The records of our Lord's life are primary. I have had some varied experiences in speaking to boys now: on Sundays and week-days, in church, in hall, out in the fields, in tents, in dress and undress uniform, to foundry boys and brigade boys, to public school boys and village boys, and this is my experience: it is possible to keep their attention by a story—for a little: it is, in some circumstances, possible to hold their attention by talk on abstract subjects: but it is impossible not to keep it, nay, further, an almost painful hush comes over the most motley crowd of boys, whenever a man speaks simply of our Lord Jesus Christ—for Jesus is a reality to a boy. *Be Real*. Edward Thring—that

master-mind and master-teacher—once said, "No falseness in the working plan in or out of school can make boys true. Whatever is professed must be done." And it is emphatically true that we must teach our boys what we believe truly, we must tell them frankly if we do not know. It may be years before the full effect of our teaching is seen in their lives; but "let patience have her perfect work." Only be true: do not go one iota beyond the truth as you know it in Jesus, and encourage in them a fearless, frank, out-spokenness in all religious matters in a spirit of real reverence. When we make a mistake we must own it, frankly, truthfully. I would then say, adapting Mrs. Browning:—

"By your truth they shall be true, Ever true as boys of yore,
And their yes, once said to you, Shall be yes for evermore."

(2) *Naturalness*. Be natural. A boy is a boy—not a man, but don't tell him this; it offends his quaint and happy waking dream. He likes to be called "man"; he prefers "old man." Still he is a boy, with a boy's openness of mind, and readiness to impression, and it is of importance that especially in all matters religious, *naturalness* be present. This is closely akin to reality: but it is not quite the same. I place it separately because of its importance. If religion cannot be natural when a boy meets it, he will turn away from it. His quick ear detects every tone that is insincere and "put on": and then, it requires the veriest trifle to take his attention away altogether. In all religious speaking, the suggestion of unnaturalness is a serious hindrance to power. A "pulpit voice," a "whine" at prayer, are unnatural and offensive. Older people dislike it. Boys despise it or laugh at it.

This feature of their mental life is splendidly hopeful. They hate cant. They have their own expressive and peculiar language for it—slang, truly, but not slang for them—they call it "pi-talk" or "pi-jaw." Here I wish to utter a caveat against two dangers: on the one hand, of being afraid of slang in quiet religious talk, on the other, of cultivating it as though it were a boy's only language. Both dangers are real. The safe-guard is in letting a healthy reverence have full play. Some phrases pass their lips without a thought—and to rebuke then and there is to quench their spirit. They had not thought of it as wrong: now they think of nothing else. On the other hand, to imagine that a boy can talk only slang when he is "off parade," is absolute nonsense. I have seen something of boys when the light of God's love in Jesus

Christ was flashing upon their soul, and while of themselves they speak in no measured terms, as not what they ought to be, the wildest, happiest-hearted little chap becomes at once reverent if the talk is of Jesus Christ our Lord.

I say unhesitatingly that all true boys show a great reverence in the depths of their natures with regard to religious matters. I have heard a would-be boy, of uncertain age, and certain foolishness, say to boys, "It's so jolly to love the Lord Jesus." I have never heard any boy say such things. A boy calls it *grand* to follow Jesus.

Be natural. Let religious talk be spontaneous. Do not force it on. If you do it because you have to do it, your boy knows that before you begin. We may have to wait long; then have faith in God: He leadeth His own by a way they know not. There is danger in delay, you say. Yes, and there is as great danger in pressing. (Oh, if I could say nothing more than this, I should be content that you would carry it alone away!) Tell a boy that he is making a mistake in putting off: but do not rub that in, it only hardens his heart. Above all, do not let his emotions run away with him. A boy is a sensitive, tender little spirit. Beneath all his radiant happiness and subdued joys, there is a quickly developing little life, and on that life every tiniest experience is making its eternal mark. The day will dawn when he will be surer of himself; when he will be held to truth by what you *were*; when one short talk, clearly printed upon his memory, will be of more value than fifty futile repetitions of a thing he did not himself know.

Be natural. Do not try to open gates of righteousness: ask God to set them open, and say you will enter into them when they are open. We dare not affect a piety we do not mean. Our boys know it at once. One word as regards Church and religion. If the minister be a good man, the boys will go willingly—but example here is foremost. Go yourselves, and do not in their hearing speak slightingly of worship—do not do it at all. One thing abides in my mind—I never heard my father say a single word derogatory to any minister, nor speak lightly of any service of God. Be natural, Sunday and Saturday alike, and above all, let your joy be natural. Nothing is so contagious as joy; sunny days make bright faces; sunny people make bright homes; and if religion be our chief joy, "God the gladness of our joy," our boys will long to know Him better.

(3) *Honour*. One more point remains of those I set before me. Where is the boy most sensitive to the claims of religion upon him? A young boy—there are exceptions of course, I am speaking in general—is most open upon the side of his sense of honour. Home is the birth-place of that sense—school is its foster-mother. A boy who does not stand up for his school is a poor creature. *Esprit de corps* is essential to high character. A boy's hardest word of reproach to another boy is "sneak." We are told this sense of honour is a matter of morality, not of religion. I admit the positive, I do not admit the negative statement: it is a matter of morality, but morality and religion ought not to be divorced. This sense of honour is an avenue by which a boy will find himself led suddenly or by slow stages near to Christ. And first of all, anything which tampers with a boy's honour is utterly bad. The habit some people have of encouraging telling of tales by one upon another cuts at the root of honour, and weakens a boy's character. Digressing for a moment, may I illustrate from the life of a friend of mine what cultivation of honour does among men? My friend is an employer of labour. Going through his works, he saw a man doing nothing: as his master approached, the man pretended to be doing something. My friend, turning, said, "If you ought to be doing nothing, continue doing it when I come: if you ought to be working, work when I am not there." That principle, steadily applied, put the workers on their honour; now every one does his best work truly and constantly. You see my point. Trust a boy, appeal to his honour, and he will in nine cases out of ten rise to the trust and responsibility. Then comes the higher claim. A higher, holier One is putting him upon his honour. Every time his heart leaps up with ambition to be noble, every time his heart beats faster when he reads of brave men doing noble deeds or sees a chivalrous thing of brave men doing noble deeds or sees a chivalrous thing done, it is Christ speaking to him. Tell him that. Connect all nobility, all moral grandeur, all truth, all purity, with Christ. Then ask him to "follow Christ."

When you have a boy's trust, you can do almost anything with him. If you have not that, you need not try to influence him. A boy is a little hero-worshipper; if you are his hero,—and his father is his hero, his mother his heroine enthroned in his heart unless they abdicate that throne,—thank God for it, and "keep thyself pure" and patient. Show that you trust him, and do not—even if you are a little unsure of him—

—try to find him out. Above all, do not change your method with him every month!

In this connection, I refer to a practice of which I find it difficult to speak in measured terms. Boys call it "tackling." Those who do it call it "personal dealing." Who is to do it? Would you trust your child to the hands of any "quack" in medicine? It is oftenest quacks in religion who do this work. They have outgrown a boy's point of view. They, with sin heavy on their own conscience, have found in Christ a Saviour, and forget that a boy's sense of sin is different. He looks upon Jesus as a Leader, Commander and Friend; the deep sense of sin usually belongs to a later stage. Often the "tackler" does his work in ways that are to a boy's mind dishonourable. He gets the boy into a corner, and lectures, or "jaws" him. He fondly imagines that the boy is listening to him, whereas in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the boy is busy planning how to escape. It is not only useless, it is mischievous.

Coercion works havoc with a boy's religious life. Treat him honourably. Be always open to speak of religion to him and with him. But while willing to meet him half way, let him come half way to meet you. Forcing means failure, and he scorns anything that even seems like "underhandedness." He has a keen sense of honour. Ay, and this is my conviction and my faith—deep in a boy's heart, when he has learned in early days of Jesus, there is, as it were, a secret shrine; there, carefully curtained off by a holy reserve is that Jesus Whom, in his deep heart, he knows and loves. He may lock the outer door of that holiest of holies, and leave it alone so long that you think he has forgotten it, but it is not so; that door will open again, *probably from the inside*, and to his waiting soul "God stand revealed as the God of Salvation."

First as with a Leader, Teacher and Friend, a boy associates with Jesus with a fine, free reverence in the upland ways of his youthful, sunny, Galilean days; later in life, when manhood with its heavier responsibilities has come to him, he goes with the Galilean disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane and up to Calvary, and when the realisation of sin flashes upon him, with its deadly danger, and its sudden, surprising power, he is standing already beside the Cross, realising that the Hero of his early days, his trusted Leader, is "the Saviour of the world."

THE SPIRIT OF COMPETITION—SHOULD IT BE ENCOURAGED?

(Discussion by the Forest Hill Branch of the P.N.E.U.,
February, 1901.)

THE CHAIRMAN (MR. F. C. SMITH) opened the discussion by calling upon MISS WORN, who said: The word competition conveys the idea that several persons enter the lists together in pursuit of some object of common desire. In consequence emulation or rivalry ensues. Emulation may be either wholesome or unwholesome. It may be moderate or carried to excess. In the latter case it is always evil. Competition in its nature is not an evil—nay, it is rather a good—but in its use it may be made subservient to either good or ill. Further, as long as animal life—including, of course, that of the human species—exists on this globe, there will be competition, for it is a law of nature, and as such, beyond our power to alter or abolish. I say animal life, for though the poets may fable the jealousies of such lovely flowers as the lily and the rose, or attribute human failings to the flaunting tulip, and human virtues, like modesty, to the humble violet; yet plant life, not possessing the power of volition, must be left out of consideration. It is the right use of competition that should engage our attention—for, rightly used, it is one of the great impelling factors of production—using the word in its widest possible sense.

Let me therefore confidently affirm "that the spirit of competition should be encouraged." What then is competition? Is it not the result of that natural yearning within us which bids us seek what is better and what is progressive? Is it not the spirit which leads us to forsake the dull, dead, monotonous level of uniformity and seek to raise, to improve, to wake into life that spark of a higher nature not yet extinguished, perhaps, even in the dullest. Someone must forge ahead, someone must lead the way, someone must kindle the flame that will rouse others to follow. Then the emulation spreads—one after another starts to his feet and sets out on the new path leading to greater things—the awakening the intellect, the heart, the soul. But the struggle must be free from envy, jealousy, and all bitterness;